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Re H.B. No. 6380 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET
FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2013

Testimony to Appropriations Subcommittee: Health and Hospitals

March 2, 2011

Sheryl Breetz, Executive Director, North Central Regional Mental Health Board

Senator Harp, Representative Candelaria, and Members of the Subcommittee:

North Central Regional Mental Health Board, as mandated by state statutes, continuously conducts independent public evaluations of mental health services funded by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). We gather information from people who use services, their families, and local communities to help DMHAS improve services. Our evaluation teams include people in recovery from mental illness, family members, and town officials - people who truly care about reporting honestly about services.

We ask you to support the Governor's budget for DMHAS.

First, the Governor's budget recognizes the importance of funding mental health services. We agree. Without effective help from the State, mental illnesses will devastate individuals and families in our State, decrease the quality of life in our communities, and cost the State in one way or another. Mental illnesses account for 25% of all disability in major industrialized countries, and I suspect this applies to Connecticut.

Second, the proposed budget supports funding for increasing numbers of young adults entering the system - where services can produce dramatic outcomes for future lives and the DMHAS system. Research shows that delays in getting help at this time can increase chances for serious disability, but that effective interventions can **increase** the likelihood that young adults will successfully gain education and employment skills and **decrease** long term disability costs for the State.

The National Conference of State Legislatures' September 2006 Policy Brief concurred that "failing to help youth successfully transition to adulthood can be costly to individuals and governments in the long run." It estimated that 90 percent of adults with serious mental illness are unemployed - the lowest rate of employment of any group of people with disabilities. Effective interventions for young adults will change this outcome and produce substantial cost savings for States.

Our evaluations of DMHAS Young Adult Services show that these services have already changed the lives of many young adults in our State. This story is told by young adults themselves, as well as by DMHAS's increasing attention to real life outcome data (which we heartily applaud). We look forward to reporting to you in 2013 the outcomes of the wise investment the Governor and General Assembly made in Young Adult Services. The General Assembly began this investment in 2000 and received national recognition as the first state in the country to have a statewide initiative to support specialized Young Adult Services.

Similarly, in other areas, the proposed budget wisely provides funding to support:

- housing to stabilize individuals, increase their chances for managing their illness, and decrease the costs of emergency room use, shelters, jails, inpatient hospitals, and other intensive services at great costs to taxpayers, and
- service capacity as new people seek mental health services or come into hospital emergency rooms with serious mental health issues that many people surmise may result from extreme psychiatric distress from continued economic duress.

We hope that you can support the proposed DMHAS budget. Our surveys show widespread confidence in DMHAS leadership to produce results.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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